From Arab Spring to the Russian 'Evolution':

Technological Impacts on Protest and Censorship

PATRICK CALLEN

Open Source, Foreign Perspective, Underconsidered/Understudied Topics

The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is an open source research organization of the U.S. Army. It was founded in 1986 as an innovative program that brought together military specialists and civilian academics to focus on military and security topics derived from unclassified, foreign media. Today FMSO maintains this research tradition of special insight and highly collaborative work by conducting unclassified research on foreign perspectives of defense and security issues that are understudied or unconsidered.

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Author Background
Since 2011, Patrick Callen has been working as a Graduate Research Assistant in a collaboration program between the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies (CREES), University of Kansas and the US Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth. The intent of this program is for select students to learn more about Eurasian security and military operational environment analysis and discover how open-source foreign language materials are used in developing informative research products.

Introduction by Ray Finch, FMSO

Since 2000, traditional Russian media sources (TV, radio, newspapers) have increasingly come under state control/supervision. By a number of different measures, traditional Russian media has been labeled as "not free." The Internet, and in particular social websites, however, remain mostly uncensored and outside of government control. Kremlin leaders recently grew concerned over the power of these new technologies when it appeared that they were being used to force political change in other countries. This brief survey looks at the evolution of social media in Russia (and to a lesser extent, Belarus) and the role these informal information platforms might have on strengthening civic engagement and the development of a more accountable government. As Patrick Callen points out, information sharing is a two-way street, and repressive governments are quick learners at exploiting these new social media tools.

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Introduction

In 2009, *The Atlantic*'s Andrew Sullivan wrote "The Revolution Will Be Twittered" in reaction to protests in Tehran.[1] New technologies and social media have changed social, political, economic, and cultural interactions. They offer greater transparency, easier and faster international exchange of information and goods (e-commerce), and the ability to transcend boundaries of place and space with greater ease than 'traditional' media, and, finally, they allow new perceptions of identity and community to form. It is the goal of this study to understand how these tools contribute to the creation of civic political identities and communities and how they interact with the political regimes in Russia and Belarus today.

Social media have transformed civic activism by allowing otherwise disconnected or loosely connected activists to collaborate and coordinate their efforts behind a common course of action. The importance of social media has grown considerably since the First and Second Twitter Revolutions in 2009, accelerated during the Arab Spring revolutions beginning in 2011, and continues today. This brief study builds upon these cases with a number of communications and
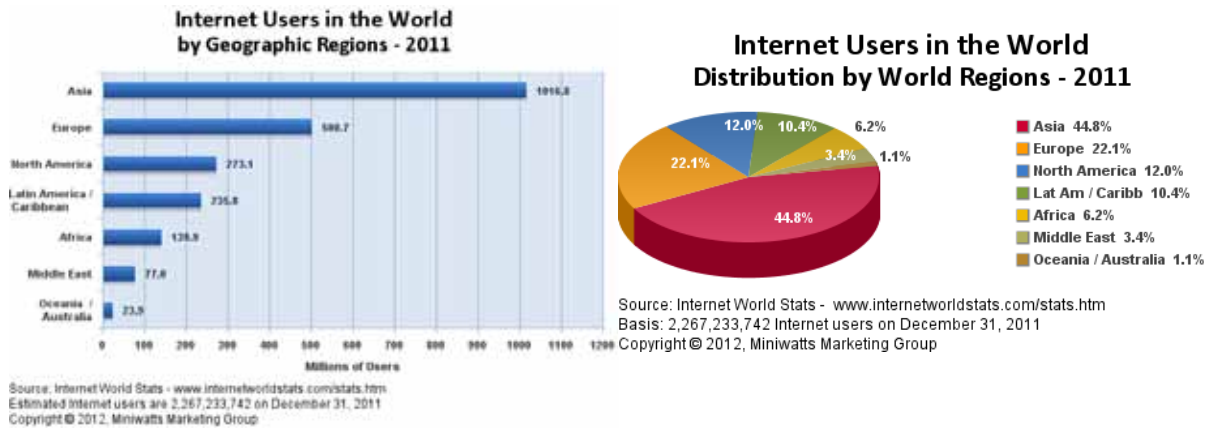
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1   Andrew Sullivan, "The Revolution Will Be Twittered," *The Atlantic, June 13, 2009,* http://www.theatlantic.com/daily-dish/archive/2009/06/the-revolution-will-be-twittered/200478 (Accessed Feb. 28, 2012.

sociological theories in an attempt to create a common foundation for understanding the role of social media in protest. This study then turns to the media environments in Belarus and Russia to highlight the methods some of the regimes in the former Soviet Union employ to curtail opposition movements. This analysis will offer preliminary answers to the following questions:

1. What new technologies are employed by activists? How do regimes keep up with this dynamic digital environment?

2. How do traditional media in Russia fair with the spread of the Internet and the increase in users of social media? Is print journalism a dying form, or do social media contribute to its evolution?

3. Does censorship exist in Russia today?

4. What is the government's role in today's Russian media environment?

5. What can be done to ensure civil liberties vis-à-vis the Internet and information access?

What is the Digital Revolution?

The Digital Revolution is typically associated with advances made in Internet browsing and the evolution of web-based services, but is also responsible for developments in mobile telecommunications. In 1990 mobile phone subscribers numbered approximately 12.4 million. Internet users numbered approximately 2.8 million, or 0.05% of the total world population. By 2011 the numbers had increased astronomically: 79% of the world population, or approximately 6 billion people, were connected via mobile phones; and 2.2 billion people, or 32.7% of the world population, were connected to the Internet (figures 1 and 2). Technological advancements and changes in the price of mobile phone and Internet subscriptions made this boom in telecommunications possible.

Internet Users in the World by Geographic Regions - 2011

Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm
Estimated Internet users are 2,267,233,742 on December 31, 2011
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Internet Users in the World Distribution by World Regions - 2011

- Asia 44.8%
- Europe 22.1%
- North America 12.0%
- Lat Am / Caribb 10.4%
- Africa 6.2%
- Middle East 3.4%
- Oceania / Australia 1.1%

Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm
Basis: 2,267,233,742 Internet users on December 31, 2011
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Figures 1 and 2 Distribution of Internet Users in the World, 2011

Developments made to the services themselves are another important facet of the Digital Revolution, particularly in the shift or the evolution of the Internet from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. What does this mean? Most simply, Web 1.0 was the first stage of the World Wide Web and was limited to hyperlinks between webpages, that is, a digital transportation device between webpages filled primarily with text. While crude in comparison to today's Internet standards, Web 1.0 was an alluring platform for businesses and consumers alike. The so-called "Internet bubble" saw huge investments in e-commerce and the returns of e-commerce portals skyrocketed until declining in 2000. Many of these dot-com startups ran out of money and were quickly acquired or liquidated. This was the fate of former Internet 'titans' like AOL and GeoCities. This summary is a gross oversimplification, but it is significant to note how important Internet business had become in the 1990s, and how critical its collapse was at the end of the decade.[2]

After the dot-com bubble burst in the late 1990s/early 2000s investors were eager to find the next great Internet startup. Web designers began to think of the Internet as a platform for user-generated content. This platform would interact with other platforms, eventually, as we see today, leading to interaction between web-based and portable devices. Web 2.0 is geared toward the user rather than the programmer: it is designed to facilitate user-centered design, interoperability,

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2   Barry M. Leiner et. al. "Brief History of the Internet," *Internet Society,* http://www.internetsociety.org/internet/internet-51/history-internet/brief-history-internet (Accessed Feb. 28, 2012.

participatory information sharing, and collaboration.[3] The greatest boom in the Web 2.0 platform was in social networking and file sharing websites: Live Journal, BlogSpot, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, Flickr, Vimeo, Vkontakte, and so on. For the purposes of this study, I consider the pros and cons of this boom. Social media allow for easier and quicker access to information, real-time global communication, and global commerce. These services are not without their critics, however. Social media are subject to digital narcissism and amateurism, inauthenticity (the pitfalls of open-source encyclopedias like Wikipedia), and "[creation of] an endless digital forest of mediocrity."[4] Despite the real and perceived flaws of certain Web 2.0 platforms, these tools are hugely popular and can serve almost any purpose a user might have for them.

Theoretical Frameworks

Twitter is a fascinating tool for this reason: more than 300 million users generate over 300 million Tweets per day, allowing for those following a particular user to track his movements or thoughts on the other side of the globe almost in real-time. This ability to monitor in real-time though is reminiscent of Orwell's "Big Brother," described in 1984. Social media allow users to keep up with their friends, favorite celebrities, and commercial interests through a few simple clicks or by searching what is "trending now"—conveniently labeled with a hash tag (#). Is there really political potential in a service whose top 10 most followed users list places President Barack Obama at number eight among the likes of Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Katy Perry, Shakira, Rihanna, Kim Kardashian, Britney Spears, Taylor Swift, and Nicki Minaj? On the surface there may not be, but there is genuine social and political capital in Twitter and other social media.

Media researcher Peter Dahlgren believes that digital media are able to transcend boundaries of place and space, ergo allowing for real networks of people, genuinely strong senses of

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3   Ibid.
4   Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 2–3.*

community and identity, to form. This "interspatiality," as he terms it, increases the social capital of users and of a civic identity.[5] Drawing upon Robert Putnam's 2000 study, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Dahlgren proposes that new media, which try to pick up the pieces of social structures that have disintegrated as citizens become less involved in political parties, churches, or other social institutions, account for greater civic interaction. Dahlgren also believes that digital and 'traditional' media can benefit from their interaction. Participatory journalism and blogging (e.g. CNN's iReporter, RIA Novosti's Ty – reporter, political blogger Aleksei Navalny, and so on) are a small portion of the total media environment in most, if not all countries, but they offer supplementary information to the news generated by state- or corporate-owned news services.[6] In assessing the importance of social media in activism Dahlgren stresses the necessity for online-initiated movements to move offline, that is to say, the vibrant online community and identity created by activists must continue its actions in the real-world. The ability to transcend digital boundaries and put activists in the streets remains, however, a difficult process.

Clay Shirky contends that social media tools are "not [a] replacement for real-world action but a way to coordinate it."[7] Shirky is considered by some to be a "net-utopian," who believes that technology can and will develop in a manner that can cope with authoritarian or oppressive uses of Internet and social media. His four stages of building a web-based community offer a tangible platform by which users can coordinate their efforts and put them into practice. Shirky's theory is very much inspired by the Web 2.0 boom: it allows for individuality while providing the necessary steps for synchronizing people based on common interests or purposes. Social media offer a concrete method for completing a task, whether it is a creative project, a new business venture, or a revolution to overthrow a pesky regime.

But did social media solve a problem that actually needed solving? Malcolm Gladwell, staff writer for The New Yorker, believes Shirky's idealization of social media is shortsighted for two

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5   Peter Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication, and Democracy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 153.*

6   Ibid., 175.

7   Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change," *Foreign Affairs (Jan./Feb. 2011), 38.*

major reasons. First, Gladwell distinguishes between weak and strong ties. He contends that social media only allow for weak ties among people to form. He does not believe social media can create the strong community ties that made pre-Digital Revolution activist movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, possible. Social media make coordination of activists and demonstrations easier, but the community that forms lacks the social capital enjoyed by movements that arose outside the digital sphere. Gladwell also sees the anonymity of protesters on the Net as a weakness when digital activism does move into the real world.[8]

Online-initiated movements often lack leadership or a solid delineation of tasks. This is the second major problem: which is stronger, the hierarchy or the network? Social media create networks with common interests, but lack a vanguard or a single, strong leader who becomes the face of the movement and carries the burden of the demonstrations on his back. Anonymity is important for coordinating demonstrations, as it allows activists to avoid the preventive measures of the regime, but decisions are based on consensus. Achieving consensus via social media can be a difficult task and wastes a lot of time—not quick and easy like Shirky believes. Gladwell believes that naming a leader expedites decision making and allows activists to see results of their efforts more quickly. Moreover, anonymity online will not necessarily ensure one's safety when activism goes offline. One is subject to the same surveillance and/or methods of deterrence that the authorities undertake.

Evgeny Morozov offers a sobering thought about the role of social media in toppling regimes. He writes, "If an authoritarian regime can crumble under the pressure of a Facebook group, whether its members are protesting online or in the streets, it's not much of an authoritarian regime."[9] Morozov's 2011 book, The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom, debunks numerous previously held notions about the power of technology. Most importantly, technology is not neutral. He writes, "There is no misconception more banal, ubiquitous, and profoundly misleading than 'technology is neutral.' It all depends, we are often told, on how one decides

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8   Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted," *The New Yorker, Oct. 4, 2010,* http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/1010004fa_fact_gladwell?currentpage=all (Accessed Feb. 28, 2012).

9   Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 198.*

to use a certain tool: a knife can be used to kill somebody, but it can also be used to carve wood."[10] To believe in the emancipatory capability of online communication without regard for its downside is naïve and evidence of 'cyber-utopianism': "The Internet is an incredible tool, but it may also encourage us to think that we can produce instantaneous movements, movements modeled after fast food delivery."[11] Cases in which the Internet played a crucial role in organizing protests have skewed the visions of policymakers, particularly in the West, which Morozov calls 'Internet-centrism.' He explains: "The pernicious tendency to place Internet technologies before the environment in which they operate—gives policymakers a false sense of comfort, a false hope that by designing a one-size-fits-all technology that destroys whatever firewall it sees, they will also solve the problem of Internet control."[12]

Morozov does not paint the Internet in a very bright light. The outlook is largely grim and bleak, but there are some shreds of hope left in Morozov's account. Looking to the collapse of the Soviet Union he challenges the notion (held by few, but there are some hardliners out there) that the United States or President Ronald Reagan "won" the Cold War. Liberation from authoritarianism or oppression of any sort is best accomplished not by gadgets, but by facts. It was not the Xerox machine that won the Cold War, and it will not be the smartphone-toting, Twitter-ready activist who will defeat authoritarianism today; the "information cascade" will fell the beast: "Ordinary information, mere facts, [will explode] like grenades, ripping apart the system and its legitimacy."[13] This method of liberation is far more acceptable in Morozov's eyes than the ideas expounded by those researchers who tout the boundless possibilities of liberation by gadgets, i.e., social media and cellphones.

Corrupt governments or hybrid regimes, discussed below, will not be toppled by facts alone, however. Corrupt regimes offer stability and sometimes prosperity at the expense of political freedoms in the liberal sense of the word.[14] Oppositional information exists within these systems,

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10   Ibid., 295.
11   Ibid., xiii.
12   Ibid., xv–xvi.
13   Ibid., 50.
14   Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).*

available to citizens via the Internet or other media portals, but the regime actively monitors these channels to maximize their political efficiency and legitimacy. The information cascade can pick away at a regime, but dictators are keen to flood the media environment with contrasting information or cheap entertainment to numb the masses, quell popular dissent, and strengthen the foundations of their political legitimacy. Technology is a double-edged sword, as it provides novel forms of global communication and commerce, while allowing governments greater access to their citizens (whether the populace is aware of it or not).

Social Media and Protest (Brief Overview)

Between 2009 and today there have been numerous instances of protest facilitated by social media (to varying extents). These tools allow users to organize, mobilize, and communicate in real-time with other demonstrators, while generally raising awareness of their actions among social media users. Successful demonstrations can be shared online and potentially inspire others to take action. One Egyptian activist discussed the interoperability of social media and its effect on their movement. She said, "We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world."[15] Here we briefly turn our attention to the use of social media by activists in Moldova, Iran, the Arab Spring revolutions, and anti-Lukashenka protests in Belarus.

Moldova

The First "Twitter Revolution" occurred in 2009 in Moldova. Tensions between pro-Romanian and pro-Moldovan supporters erupted into protests against Moldova's Communist leadership after accusations of government interference in the parliamentary elections, giving greater power to the Communists. Slogans from the protests included, "We want Europe," "We are Romanians," and "Down with Communism" (Image 1).

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15   Philip N. Howard, "The Arab Spring's Cascading Effects," *Miller-McCune, Feb. 23, 2011,* http://www. miller-mccune.com/politics/the-cascading-effects-of-the-arab-spring-28575/ (Accessed Feb. 28, 2012).

Image 1 Anti-government and anti-communist protesters in Chisinau, Moldova.

One Tweet from the protesters stated: "North of Moldova TV is off!!! But we have THE ALMIGHTY INTERNET! Let us use it to communicate peacefully for freedom!!"[16] As firsthand accounts of the protests flooded Twitter and the Internet as a whole, Internet service in Chisinau, the capital, was abruptly cut off. Despite the crackdown and violence that occurred, the role of social media was obvious. Evgeny Morozov himself said so (!), writing, "Nobody expected such a massive scale. I don't know of any other factor which could account for it."[17]

Iran

The second "Twitter Revolution" occurred in June 2009 in Tehran, Iran. Iranian citizens came out in support of Mir-Hossein Mousavi (Image 2) in the presidential election against incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The results of the elections were strongly contested by the Green Movement and the supporters of the "Green Revolution." As protesters filled the streets, Twitter was fluttering with the real-time pulse of the movement. The perceived power of Twitter in strengthening support of the Green Movement was touted by The Atlantic's Andrew Sullivan, among other foreign observers. Sullivan's infamous praise of social media ("The Revolution will be Twittered") fell on silenced ears, however, as the government cracked down on the protesters and placed Mousavi under house arrest, where he remains to this day.

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16   Shaun Walker, "Russia furious with EU over Twitter revolution," *The Independent, April 9, 2009,* http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-furious-with-eu-over-twitter-revolution-1666121.html (Accessed Feb. 28, 2012).

17   Quoted in Ellen Barry, "Protests in Moldova Explode, With Help of Twitter," *The New York Times, April 7, 2009,* http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/europe/08moldova.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all (Accessed Feb. 28, 2012).

Image 2 Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Iranian Reformist Candidate, 2009[18]

Iranian Twitter activity seemed to show ubiquitous support for the protests; foreign observers overlooked the fact that much of the activity was conducted in English or languages other than Farsi. Observers simply latched on to the flurry of activity found via Twitter's convenient hash tags and trending topics. While the West began to laud the power of social media, the Iranian government turned to the very same networks as a tool for prosecuting citizens they were able to identify in pictures, video, or tags by location in the social media updates, or from text messages or phone calls made by demonstrators themselves. The political power of technology cuts both ways: it allows the development of political sentiment while granting the authorities easy access to information that can be used to deter or combat potential competition.

Arab Spring Revolutions

Social media reemerged as a powerful tool for activists when protests began in the Arab world in spring 2011. The revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests spread across the Arab world, calling into question the continued legitimacy of autocratic regimes and demanding campaigns against government corruption, kleptocracy, human rights violations, and myriad other causes. The recurring slogan of protesters is "People demand the removal of the regime" (Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam, Image 3).

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18   Photo courtesy of Reuters, found at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/7811996/Mir-Hossein-Mousavi-involved-in-massacre-says-report.html (Accessed Feb. 26, 2012).

Image 3 "People demand the removal of the regime" in Tahrir Square, Egypt[19]

Protesters turned to social media and sharing services to make their actions known. In Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya demonstrations, violence, and disorder have led to successful regime change. In other countries, in particular Syria, the regime continues to dispose of the opposition by increasingly violent means. Despite the heavy loss of life the Arab Spring revolutions continue to draw global attention, and the efforts of protesters are repeatedly uploaded to YouTube, Tweeted about, or "Liked" on Facebook. The Arab uprisings and revolutions have also inspired other movements, such as the Belarusian 'silent' protests and the Russian 'Evolution'.

Belarus

The continued decline of the social, political, and economic situation in Belarus has created favorable conditions for protest. The Belarusian authorities continue to meddle in society and what little civil liberties Belarusian citizens have. The April 11, 2011 Minsk Metro bombing at the Oktyabrskaya station is an example of perceived terrorist threats manifesting themselves in Belarus. The perception of terrorist threats plays a crucial role in Belarusian policy and the regime's interest in limiting civil liberties in order to safeguard the country and, perhaps more importantly to President Lukashenka, the legitimacy of the regime. The Internet and media restrictions imposed by the Belarusian government are part of a global security policy adopted by many nations at present. In light of the regime's continued degradation of civil society, Belarusian

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19   Photo courtesy of SocialistAlternative.org, found at http://www.socialistalternative.org/news/article11.php?id=1517 (Accessed Feb. 26, 2012).

citizens continue to openly criticize Lukashenka's regime.[20] Social media play a crucial role in the recurring "Revolution through Social Networks" protests, also known as the "silent protests" or "silent solidarity" (Image 4 and 5).[21]
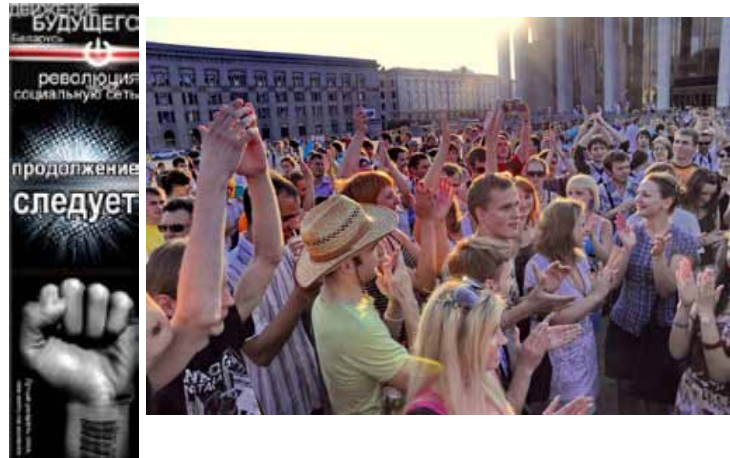

Image 4 and 5 Banner of the "Revolution through Social Networks" movement[22], and a scene from the 'silent protests' in Minsk, Belarus, 2011[23]

The protests continue to be a thorn in Lukashenka's side despite high numbers of arrests, prompting authorities to restrict access to social networking sites and other Internet portals. This does not stop protesters, however, as demonstrations continue to take place in Minsk today.[24]

The Russian 'Evolution'

The development and increased availability of new technologies have also had an impact on Russia's developments since the fall of the Soviet Union. The spread of the Internet and the reduction of costs in mobile phones, laptops, and other portable technologies allow citizens to more easily interact with one another across Russia's vast expanses, while allowing

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20   Video of demonstration, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOfbyGqzXKw

21   "Belarusian Organized Campaign of 'Silent Solidarity'", *Telegraf.by, June 6, 2011,* http://telegraf.by/2011/06/belarusians_organized_campaign_of_silent_solidarity_-_video (Accessed June 8, 2011).

22   Image found at vk.com/futuremovement (Accessed Feb. 26, 2012).

23   Photo courtesy of Nasha Niva, found at http://democraticbelarus.eu/node/12755 (Accessed Feb. 28, 2012).

24   Video of demonstration, see: http://naviny.by/rubrics/english/2012/02/11/ic_media_video_259_6503/

peripheral or remote territories to stay informed of developments in the centers.[25] Greater access to information promotes the development of civil society and the dissemination of public sentiments, which the Soviets had regulated heavily and largely suppressed until the late 1980s. The availability of and access to new technologies can, on the one hand, pose a risk to Russia's governing bodies today, as potentially destabilizing information can spread throughout the country in a matter of seconds. On the other hand, the regime can also use technology to its advantage, promoting social, political, economic, and diplomatic initiatives to the populace, notwithstanding the benefits technology affords to regimes looking for new ways to control their populations.

This duality is the subject of the following discussion, which highlights the various uses of technology and social media in Russia today, particularly among civil activists and the regime. The interaction between these actors is made easier, yet more fickle due to technology. The regime ostensibly promotes democratic principles, including freedoms of speech, assembly and access to information, but the channels provided to citizens to enjoy these freedoms are strictly monitored by the authorities. Terrorist threats, fears of separatism, and the maintenance of the state's strong image factor into Russia's present media environment. The censorship of the bygone Soviet years does not exist today, but strict surveillance and the both real and perceived threat of harm for openly criticizing the regime promotes a level of self-censorship among journalists and other public media figures. In light of the developments that took place within civil society during the recent parliamentary and presidential elections (2011–2012) it is possible to speculate that the Russian media environment has indeed evolved. Putin's third presidential term will be the determining factor as to whether such speculation becomes reality.

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25   A March 2012 report conducted by Yandex concluded that 54.5 million people (47% of the Russian population) use the Internet on a regular basis (an increase of 17% since 2010). 93% of new Internet users reside in the regions outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg, though the centers continue to hold most of the users. See: Analytical Department of Marketing Company "Yandex", "Razvitie interneta v regionakh Rossii" [Internet development in Russia's regions]. *Yandex.* http://company.yandex.ru/researches/reports/internet_regions_2012.xml (Accessed April 18, 2012).

Traditional Media Environment

Media freedoms in the 1990s had improved considerably in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union. While perestroika helped lay the foundations for greater freedoms within all sections of Soviet society, the media continued to be dominated by the State. A high level of state censorship characterized the Soviet media environment, yet the tendency toward self-censorship was practically ubiquitous within the Soviet system. The pervasiveness of censorship, both direct and indirect, made the presence of oppositional voices virtually unknown, allowing the Soviet media to create the illusion of contact between society and the government while maintaining dominance over public information.

Perestroika may have generated the appropriate conditions for reform, but politicians remained mindful of the power of the Soviet media model. Public sentiments may have changed and called for the transformation of the media outlets early in the former Soviet Union, but the politicians were aware of and dependent upon the profound influence government had on the media and that the media possess in shaping public opinion. McQuail's Mass Communication Theory does, however, hold a more suitable definition of Soviet and post-Soviet media theory. He states that the "authoritarian theory of the press" provides a better fit for the Soviet system, noting that fundamentally this theory can refer to a set of arrangements "in which neutrality is expected from the press in respect of government and state, to those in which the press is deliberately and directly used as a vehicle for repressive state power."[26]

Though journalists are often constrained by their editors or the media's owners, they continue to play a crucial role in post-Soviet politics and power dynamics. A trend in the former Soviet Union seems to be developing, that of a double (or possibly triple) standard for mass media. On one hand, traditional media and their online counterparts contribute to the development of civil society in the former authoritarian states, providing greater access to ideas and opinions. On the other hand, these media provide governments with valuable information that officials can use to

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26   Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction (London: SAGE Publications, 1984), 93–94.*

improve the lives and liberties of civil society. The third standard for the media in Russia today allows the government to limit its citizens' freedom of access on the grounds of perceived threats to Russia's national security. In the wake of events such as the Beslan school hostage crisis (2004), the Nord-Ost theater siege (2002), the Minsk metro bombing (2011), and the perpetual threats posed by Chechnya, the Russian government is using new technologies and new methods for accessing information to bolster its counterterrorist activities and capabilities.[27]

The post-Soviet authoritarianism that saw a state-led heavy-handed approach to undercutting resistant media outlets, namely assaults or murders of journalists and raiding media offices, has become increasingly rare. Dmitri Medvedev's tenure has made considerable improvements over his predecessor's Soviet-style methods for garnering public support through lessons from Western media outlets which 'manufacture consent' (to borrow a term from Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky)[28] by filling the post-Cold War void with an "'ideology' of anti-terrorism."[29] In this regard, Simons concludes that the Kremlin has become more astute in its methods of managing Russian media outlets through carefully placed rhetorical responses to oppositional sources, i.e., a 'propaganda model' for a new era of war reporting. On this point Simons' conclusions shine and provide insight into a sobering area of research: the fact that democratic regimes are not alone in their perceptive manipulation of media. Terrorist organizations and authoritarian regimes alike have shown how adept they can be in manufacturing and maintaining an ideology.[30] The Internet has been touted as a beacon of democratic expectation and hope but, as Simons has shown, freedom of speech and expression via the worldwide web is a double-edged sword, especially today, as terrorist concerns continue to influence both domestic and foreign policy in the Russian Federation.

In a discussion of Russian security measures taken in advance of the 2014 Olympics in

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27   See: Greg Simons, *Mass Media and Modern Warfare: Reporting on the Russian War on Terrorism (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).*

28   See: Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media (New York: Pantheon, 1994).*

29   Ibid., 71.

30   Ibid., 192–193.

Sochi, Andrei Novikov, head of the CIS Anti-Terrorist Center, noted "that 80 percent of all the valuable information is obtained from the media. In these times, maybe more." When asked what was being stored (skladirovat'), Novikov replied "We're not storing anything – we're analyzing."[31] This analysis is evident of the third standard for the media, discussed above, in that the government limits freedoms of information on the basis of national security, in this case, as Russia continues its preparations for the Sochi Olympics. This trend involves the continued use of the media as a source for governing, but instead of improving civil society it contributes to new methods for governments to police their citizens. While connections between an authoritarian press model and the conduct of the regime in the control of the media are apparent, the application of the model today requires a rebranding, which suits post-Soviet socio-political contexts. Russia's political system today continues trends of governance from the late Soviet period, particularly that of Leonid Brezhnev's tenure as General Secretary (1964–1982). The authoritarianism typical of Soviet power is now mixed with democratic principles, thus forming a hybrid, semi-authoritarian regime that controls Russia's future trajectory.

Hybridization

Social media in authoritarian regimes are largely non-existent or, if they do exist, they are heavily regulated and monitored by the authorities. In those instances where citizens of authoritarian regimes have access to social media, the demonstrators often use social media without being cognizant that these same media can be used against them. The state's ability to monitor these sites and use information disseminated through these services is a fundamental flaw in the use of social media for protest. It provides access to information that allows the government to track down activists during and after demonstrations to prosecute them. This information also allows authorities to deter activists prior to scheduled demonstrations, which is a

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31   Igor' Panarin and Andrei Novikov, "Intellektualnyi otvet terroristam" [Intellectual Response to Terrorists], *Radio Golos Rossii, June 21, 2011,* http://rus.ruvr.ru/radio_broadcast/620486/52113965.html (Accessed June 24, 2011). The use of the word *skladirovat' is interesting, in this instance, since Russians tend to use khranit' when talking about storing information. Skladirovat' suggests storing away or setting aside information for use at a later time.*

borrowing from Brezhnev's playbook. This is what Graeme B. Robertson refers to as "preventive detention and harassment to preempt protest actions."[32]

This method of deterrence is part of a new political structure that Robertson calls a hybrid regime. A hybrid regime is founded on democratic principles, but is, in practice, part of a deliberate strategy designed to extract the benefits of political competition while minimizing the likelihood of the regime's loss of control and legitimacy. These regimes must balance significant political freedoms for citizens while avoiding dangerous levels of opposition. It is important to understand that in a hybrid regime the state's access to information and public feedback are necessary for its continued development and improvement of its performance. Without this information the state would risk falling into stagnation and losing control of the populace as it becomes disenfranchised with the lack of prosperity, potentially jeopardizing the legitimacy of the regime.[33]

Observable repression is therefore less necessary in these regimes because, as Shirky writes, "the government recognizes that threats to its legitimacy are coming from inside the state and that blocking the Web site of The New York Times does little to prevent grieving mothers from airing their complaints about corruption."[34] Regimes are less concerned with restricting access than with maintaining the status quo they have cultivated. It is only in authoritarian regimes that the status quo is maintained by more observable methods.[35]

Interaction between Traditional and Social Media

While the media environment in Russia has improved considerably since the fall of the Soviet Union, the populace remains skeptical about the messages the traditional media forms

32   Graeme B. Robertson, "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin's Russia," *Slavic Review, Vol. 68, no. 3 (Fall, 2009), 537.*

33   Ibid., 573. See also: Graeme B. Robertson, *The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes: Managing Dissent in Post-Communist Russia (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).*

34   Shirky, 38–39.

35   For a discussion of the post- or neo-Soviet media model see: Nadezhda Azhgikhina, "The Struggle for Press Freedom in Russia: Reflections of a Russian Journalist," Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 59, no. 8 (Dec., 2007): 1245–1262; Sarah Oates, "The Neo-Soviet Model of the Media," Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 59, no. 8 (Dec., 2007): 1279–1297; Hedwig De Smaele, "Mass Media and the Information Climate in Russia," Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 59, no. 8 (Dec., 2007): 1299–1313.

(press, television, and radio) are sending. As social networking sites, blogs, and independent online sources flourish, the possibility for the traditional media and the traditional methods for government control to feel threatened are greater. In Editor-in-Chief of Guardian News & Media, Alan Rusbridger's assessment, the first major challenge traditional authoritarian methods of control face in this new environment, "is that world media is [sic] becoming more open and those who want to stay closed are not going to survive."[36] As the technological revolution continues to sweep across the globe, traditionally authoritarian regimes face greater challenges in keeping their citizens disconnected and passive, especially as the Internet becomes more readily available to greater numbers of users.

What can the state do if it is unable to use traditional censorship? The authorities can influence the media through other means, chief among them non-violent harassment and threats. Or they can flood the media environment with drivel, "circus," and tabloid political materials that do not leave space for objective reporting. This is typical of numerous countries that prefer to fill the 24-hour news cycle with celebrity news, shouting matches between reporters and analysts, or other forms of infotainment. Morozov notes the proclivity of authoritarian regimes to make cheap entertainment readily available for their citizens. He writes, "Even authoritarian governments have discovered that the best way to marginalize dissident books and ideas is not to ban them—but to let the invisible hand flood the market with trashy popular detective stories, self-help manuals, and books on how to get your kids into Harvard."[37] This makes it difficult for an opposition to form, because the general population believes everything truly is getting better (despite the situation they find themselves in), or potential activists are unable to formulate a concrete program for a movement to succeed. Authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes are also well-versed in managing dissent more passively, i.e., these regimes have determined the most

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36   Alexander Stelliferovsky, "Future media: 'Don't be afraid to fail'", *RIA Novosti, June 24, 2011,* http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110624/164830359.html (Accessed June 25, 2011). See also: "V Moskve prokhodit mezhdunarodnyi forum 'Media budushchego" [Moscow hosts international forum 'Media Future'], *Radio Golos Rossii, June 24, 2011,* http://rus.ruvr.ru/2011/06/24/52326205.html (Accessed June 26, 2011), Elizaveta Isakova, "Sotsial'nye seti ne zameniat traditsionnye SMI" [Social networking sites will not replace traditional media], *Radio Golos Rossii, June 24, 2011,* http://rus.ruvr.ru/2011/06/24/52356688.html (Accessed June 26, 2011).

37   Morozov, 69.

effective system of Internet control "is not the one that has the most sophisticated and draconian system of censorship, but the one that has no need for censorship whatsoever."[38]

"For Fair Elections"

How strong is the impulse for sweeping change and the evolution of civic society in Russia today? When protests broke out after the disputed results of the December 4, 2011 parliamentary elections in the Russian Federation, resulting in as many as 100,000 citizens filling the streets of Moscow,[39] the impulse for change appeared high. Protesters demanded a new round of "cleaner" elections, and spoke out against the "party of crooks and thieves" (Image 5).

Image 5 Flyer from the city of Vladimir calling citizens to a meeting against voting falsifications[40]

Have the actions of various political and civil actors discredited the regime's credibility? The regime seems to be heeding the protests of Russian citizens and political opposition while

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38   Ibid., 58.
39   Comparatively smaller protests took place in other cities across the Russian Federation.
40   Photo found at: http://city33.ru/blog/gorod/1965.html (Accessed Feb. 28, 2012).

maintaining and strengthening Putin and Medvedev's tandem position as the 'benefactors' of Russia so as to preserve the autocratic and corrupt control of the Russian Federation.[41]

Both opposition and pro-regime activists alike are using social media and sharing websites to draw attention to their causes. Allegations have come out that Putin supporters have been harassing Russian celebrities to publicize their support in the "I'm voting for Putin" (Ia golosuiu za Putina) campaign. Threats of cutting off funding to charities, blackmailing or "dragging their names through the gutters," and fostering violence have all come out in these allegations. Russian media icon Ksenia Sobchak posted a darkly satirical response to the "Ia golosuiu za!" campaign. In the video she appears ragged and agitated, unlike her typical hyper-confident, hyper-refined image. She says:

> I have decided to vote for this candidate because the economy and standard of living in our country have become much better. He has always been responsive to any request. He has helped us all. And especially now, with the threat of an Orange Revolution like in Syria or Libya, we can't rock the boat. We must rally around one leader. This is why I made this difficult decision.[42]

The camera pans out revealing Sobchak tied to a chair. Behind her are two masked police officers with guns drawn, at the ready to coerce Sobchak into continuing her statement. The director, in a leather jacket, enters the frame saying "nice job" while patting her on the head. The director then tapes her mouth shut and the police officers carry her off despite her desperate muffled screams. Looking into the camera the director asks, "Was everything OK with the camera? Was the sound alright? OK then, let's bring in [Aleksei] Venediktov," the editor-in-chief of Ekho Moskvy, who was threatened by Putin for perhaps being too liberal. As the director

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41   My thanks go to Prof. Gerald Mikkelson for his thoughts on this matter, which were elegantly provided in his frequent memos during his travels to Russia in winter 2011–2012. He writes, "the powers that be in Russia intend not to give an inch in their campaign to preserve their autocratic and corrupt control over the first fruits of the wealth of the nation and franchise as the sole 'deciders' of Russia's fate for at least the next twelve years."

42   Brian Whitmore, "The Power Vertical: Ksenia Sobchak Strikes Again," *RFERL, Feb. 23, 2012,* http://www.rferl.org/content/ksenia_sobchak_strikes_again/24494264.html (Accessed Feb. 25, 2012).

turns away he mumbles to himself, "Are we going sit here all night?"[43]

From early observations one thing is certain: the 2012 presidential elections are representative of the major changes made in Russia since 1991. The question remains whether Russia will face its domestic challenges with democratic reforms or continue to address civil social and political concerns with a heavy hand. Serious evaluation from all levels of Russian society is a necessity, otherwise jokes that tend to materialize more frequently than serious assessments might become a reality, such as Kommersant correspondent Oleg Kashin's, "My vsem umrem pri Putine" [We're all going to die under Putin]."[44]

What Is to Be Done?

For Western policymakers Internet accessibility and democratization potential are often synonymous. Western interpretations of democracy rest partially on the notion of an 'open society,' a society that is allowed to access information as it pleases (except for information that remains "classified" and sealed away in government archives). The restrictions or denial of access placed on the Internet by governments (namely Egypt, Syria, and Bahrain) during the Arab Spring revolutions, as well as longstanding limits on Internet accessibility in countries such as North Korea, Russia, Belarus, and China, have led the United States government to spearhead and fund the creation of "shadow" Internet and mobile phone systems. A $2-million State Department grant is part of a growing global effort to undermine repressive governments that seek to limit, censor, or shut down oppositional movements by monitoring and controlling telecommunications networks. According to a New York Times report from June 12, 2011, the State Department is recognizing the widespread concerns about Internet accessibility and restrictions on freedom of information across the globe, and is "simply taking advantage of enterprising dissidents who have found ways to get around government censorship."[45]

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43   Video available on Ms. Sobchak's YouTube page: www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxEWddT44BY.
44   Oleg Kashin, "My khoteli stabilnosti – my ee poluchili" [We wanted stability – we got it", *Kommersant, July 7, 2011,* http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1682929 (Accessed July 9, 2011).
45   James Glanz and John Markoff, "U.S. Underwrites Internet Detour Around Censors," *The New York Times, June 12, 2011,* http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/12/world/12internet.html (Accessed June 13, 2011).

The State Department initiative varies from burying Chinese cellphones in the hills bordering North Korea to the creation of an "internet in a suitcase" system that can be concealed and transported easily, allowing for quick and easy access to a wireless communication network with a link to the global Internet. The technological revolution—namely the extensive use of the Internet, text messaging, and social networking—has changed the face of protest and revolution over the past year. These technologies have created new avenues for mass online sentiment to erupt into a mass physical protest, which allows for public disapproval to more quickly effect political change. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said last year, "There is a historic opportunity to effect positive change, change America supports. So we're focused on helping them [dissidents] do that, on helping them talk to each other, to their communities, to their governments and to the world."[46]

The Internet is a wonderful tool for accomplishing political goals, but Western notions of freedom of information clash with those of former Soviet republics, in particular among older Russians. Vladimir Shalpentokh suggests that "the assumption that openness always promotes democracy and guarantees it will function [turns] out to be wrong, since the extension of openness and the fading away of Russia's fledgling democracy [has] been evolving simultaneously."[47] The disconnect among interpretations of openness suggests that the future of Russian openness is bleak. Oppositional information or ideas that could destabilize the country will continue to be stifled. Nikolai Troitsky, an analyst with Russian news agency RIA Novosti, offered the assessment that the United States and other Western nations are too subjective in their treatment of technology vis-à-vis protest and revolutionary capabilities. Arguing against the effectiveness of the United States' "shadow" Internet project, Troitsky states:

> You should not confuse technological progress with policy. Revolution does
> not live within technology. It is necessary to lay down an objective situation, in

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46   Quoted in Ibid.
47   Vladimir Shlapentokh, "Russia's Openness to the World: The Unpredicted Consequences of the Country's Liberalization," *Johnson's Russia List, June 10, 2011, http://* http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/russia-shlapentokh-russian-new-openness-unpredicted-consequences-105.cfm (Accessed June 14, 2011).

which there is the impotence of the rulers and large-scale demonstration of solid masses. No civil society activists armed with iPhones, Androids or other gadgets. Offline, that is, in reality, they [the authorities] are simply catching everything, clearing them out and suppressing them. And there is no alternative network that will help. Democracy, like revolution, cannot be exported overseas like fruit, which the local public organism is not accustomed to. It does not take root; or, it causes indigestion.[48]

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48   Nikolai Troitsky, "Svoboda prikhodit onlain" [Freedom comes online], *RIA Novosti, June 14, 2011,* http://ria.ru/videocolumns/20110614/388217735.html (Accessed June 15, 2011).

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